

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

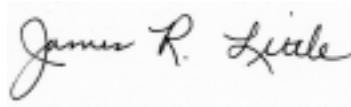
Farm Service Agency
Washington, DC 20250

Notice PM-2388

For: FSA Employees

Merit Promotion Process

Approved by: Administrator



1 Overview

A Purpose

This notice informs FSA employees of merit promotion procedures in the following areas:

- areas of consideration
- KSA statements
- rating panels
- interviews and interview panels.

B FSA Policy

Supervisors and managers shall provide fair, equitable, and full consideration to all candidates without discrimination or favoritism.

C Noncompetitive Actions

Selecting officials have the option of filling positions noncompetitively through programs such as the Student Career Experience Program, Workforce Recruitment Program, and Career Intern Program.

D Labor Management Obligations

Where exclusive representation exists, bargaining may be requested to the extent allowed by applicable statutes. Where contract language already addresses these policies and procedures for bargaining unit employees, contract language prevails.

Disposal Date	Distribution
October 1, 2005	All FSA employees; State Offices relay to County Offices

1 Overview (Continued)

E Additional Information

If additional information is needed, contact the following.

Office	Contact
National Office	Servicing Employment Specialist in HRD
Kansas City Offices APFO State Offices	Servicing Employment Specialist in KCAO, HRD
County Offices	State Office

2 Merit Promotion Consideration Procedures

A Areas of Consideration

A broad area of consideration:

- increases the applicant pool
- diversifies the applicant pool
- allows employee mobility.

FSA requires that 2-grade interval vacancies be announced nationwide. Nationwide announcements are required to be posted for a minimum of 21 calendar days. The following vacancies are exempted from the nationwide requirement:

- 1-grade interval positions
- vacancies in States that do not have the ceiling for an outside hire
- Career Enhancement vacancies
- Career Transition Assistance Program (CTAP) vacancies.

2 Merit Promotion Consideration Procedures (Continued)

A Areas of Consideration (Continued)

Determine the minimum area of consideration for 2-grade interval vacancies and for exempted vacancies according to the following.

Type of Vacancy	Minimum Area of Consideration
2-grade vacancies	FSA nationwide
1-grade vacancies	FSA local commuting area
vacancies in States with no ceiling for outside hires	FSA Statewide
Career Enhancement	FSA local commuting area
CTAP	CTAP eligibles - local commuting area

B Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSA's)

KSA's consisting of narrative statements or job-related questions must be identified for each position.

Both narrative statements and job-related questions are based on an analysis of the KSA's and competencies needed to perform the position.

Agencies have the option of using either narrative KSA statements or job-related KSA questions to rank applicants.

KSA's will be:

- standardized for similar positions, except when positions require specific KSA's that are not typical of other positions of that series, or when positions are interdisciplinary in nature because of added functions assigned to the job
- reflected in the official position descriptions
- generic rather than specific, whenever possible.

Job-related KSA questions are designed to reduce the burden on applicants when applying for vacancies or promotions by requiring responses to questions instead of narrative KSA statements.

2 Merit Promotion Consideration Procedures (Continued)

C Rating Panels

When using narrative KSA statements, either a Merit Promotion rating panel or a HR specialist/subject matter expert may be used to rate and rank applicants.

When using job-related KSA questions, an automated ranking of responses is used to rate applicants.

If an automated ranking of responses to job-related questions is not used to rate and rank candidates, rating panels:

- are mandatory when there are more than 10 competitive candidates for a particular grade level
- may be used if there are 10 or less competitive candidates
- rate and rank qualified applicants to determine which applicants are best qualified and referred to the selecting official.

HRD and KCAO, HRD shall:

- ensure that rating panels include subject matter experts and are diverse
- ensure that rating panel members are at a grade level not lower than the full performance level of the position being filled
- consult with managers and supervisors for suggested panel members
- make final panel member determinations.

Union representatives may suggest panel members.

An EEO observer shall be requested to serve as an observer during rating panel deliberations. EEO observers serve as observers only and do not rate and rank applicants.

2 Merit Promotion Consideration Procedures (Continued)

D Selection Process for Nonsupervisory Positions

For nonsupervisory positions, selecting officials may select an applicant either from the:

- competitive certificate, that is, from among applicants seeking promotion or promotion potential
- noncompetitive certificate, that is, from among applicants already at that grade, formerly at that grade, or who hold or held a position with potential to that grade.

Selecting officials shall interview all candidates at a particular grade level on the merit promotion certificate used for selection. This does not apply to certificates issued by OPM or Kansas City Delegated Examining Unit.

If no selection is made, the selecting official shall provide justification to the next higher level official for approval of nonselection before returning the certificate to HRD or KCAO, HRD.

E Interview Panels for Supervisory Positions

Interview panels are mandatory for:

- all supervisory grades GS-14 and above in the National Office
- all supervisory grades GS-13 and above in Field Offices
- all Administrative Officers
- all Farm Loan Managers.

Interview panels are **not** mandatory for nonsupervisory positions.

Interview panels shall:

- be determined by management
- consist of at least 3 persons at or above the grade level of the position being filled who have knowledge of the position
- refer to 3-PM, paragraphs 87 through 89

2 Merit Promotion Consideration Procedures (Continued)

E Interview Panels for Supervisory Positions (Continued)

- include an EEO representative or a member of the CR/EEO Advisory Council as an observer for all interview panels

Note: The State Civil Rights Coordinator or Special Emphasis Program Manager may serve as the EEO representative in the field.

- be diverse
- interview all candidates at a particular grade level on the merit promotion selection certificate used for selection

Note: This does not apply to certificates issued by OPM or Kansas City Delegated Examining Unit.

- use standardized questions, based on the position description, and reflecting management and technical areas
- rate applicants high, medium, or low based on their response to the panel questions.

Selecting officials are encouraged to select from the highly ranked applicants, as rated by the interview panel.

- If a selection is not made from the highly ranked applicants, written justification shall be provided to the next higher level official for approval before final decision.
- If no selection is made, the selecting official shall provide justification to the next higher level official for approval of nonselection.

Until further notice, selecting officials are responsible for maintaining records of interview panel records and scores indefinitely. Selecting officials will contact servicing human resources specialists for information on disposal of these records.

3 Roles and Responsibilities

A Supervisor/Manager Responsibilities

Supervisors and managers shall:

- work closely with HRD or KCAO, HRD in the recruitment process
- interview applicants
- arrange interview panels, as required
- review and use workforce profiles before making selections
- support cultural diversity training for all employees
- guide and assist employees in developing skills and abilities.

B Union Role

Union representatives may:

- assist HRD and KCAO, HRD in developing training modules
- encourage members to understand the Merit Promotion Plan and process
- evaluate and provide input about the merit promotion process.

4 Information

A Merit Promotion Information

“Climb the Ladder of SUCCESS with FFAS” is available on CD from:

- the National Office at:
<http://dc.ffasintranet.usda.gov/hrd/Merit%20Promotion/climbing2/sld001.htm>
- all other FFAS offices at:
<http://intranet.fsa.usda.gov/KCAO/pdweb/employbranch/EB.htm>

Click on discs. These sites explain:

- what Merit Promotion is
- how Federal positions are advertised
- how to apply for Federal positions
- the automated, on-line USA Staffing application process
- types of appointments
- student programs
- veterans programs
- interviewing tips.